

BIRDS OF DIFFERENT FEATHERS

A book on birds for young readers

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“Stop!” I cried, at the two yellow birds. They were zipping past between trees chasing a crow.

Though I frequent the lakeside park, I had not seen these birds before. The bright yellow of one of them fascinated me. The other was duller, more yellowish green. They were big but certainly not as big as a pigeon.

It was only after they drove the crow out into the open sky, did they return. They then kept looking around anxiously, uttering sharp harsh but soft calls.

“Why were you chasing the crow away?” I asked hesitantly.

No reply.

When I was about to give up, the duller of the two softly said, "I am Mother Oriole. This is Father Oriole. And that is our first born."

"Oh!" I said, "But where is your first born? I can't see him anywhere."

No reply again.

Both Father and Mother Orioles appeared restless. I searched around helplessly. My attention was then drawn to an ugly looking chick valiantly trying to scramble up a





bush. The chick, with an untidy head and a stubby tail was dull yellow green like mother oriole. "That must be their first born!" I said almost to myself.

Mother Oriole must have seen me noticing her chick.

"You're right. That is our chick. There is one more in the nest up there" she said.

"Up where?"

Taking the hint, Father Oriole flew up into the Siris tree and alighted beside what looked like a nest. Now, the nest was really UP! I would have never spotted it by myself.

I narrowed my eyes to see better. "Oh! That is a pretty nest", I observed, regretting not having brought along my binoculars. It was deep and made in a fork at the end of a high branch. I was amused to see a plastic carry bag interwoven with what looked like dried grass. "Birds have use for plastic too!" I mused.

In the nest was another chick. I could only see its head. I was amazed at what I saw. Something was very puzzling.

"Your chick can't fly! I saw it jump. No hop. No climb. Oh! Whatever. How ... how ..." I blurted out.

Even before I could finish, Mother Oriole, with a proud





admiring look on her face said, "He fell, you see ..."

"What!" I exclaimed, not allowing her to complete. My thoughts raced back a year to recall the painful fall I had myself. Down I fell from the tree in our garden and snap went my arm bone!

"Did you check if he has broken his arm or something?"

"Wings, you mean? No. My chick's wings are not broken. In fact, nothing is broken. Today it was time for him to get out of the nest and learn to fly. While trying, he fell. You should know chicks learn to flap their wings much before they are ready to leave their nest. And so they do not fall hard.

Sometimes, very young chicks fall off their nests. They are so soft and light that most times they are not hurt. However, sometimes chicks do get hurt or ...”.

She would have continued had I not interrupted her.

“Don’t you think you should have built your nest lower down. Why, much much lower down?”

The nest was on a tall tree. Thrice as tall as the one I fell off from. I could not understand why these birds had to build their nest on such a high branch if their chicks were in the habit of falling off.





Mother Oriole laughed out heartily. Realizing how little I knew about birds, she tried to explain:

“We are birds of tall trees. We are almost never seen on the ground. We like shady trees. When we are up in shady, tall trees, nobody can see us. Why, I saw you in this park the day we came here, but you never once saw us. We like fruits and berries and nectar. Our food is available in plenty in the tall trees we frequent. Hence we prefer to build our nests where we are comfortable and safe. Do you know something? We come all the way from South India here, to the north, to nest and raise our chicks. The hot weather is what we need for our chicks.”

She smiled gently at me. At the same time she was making sure that her first born was safe. Father Oriole flew in with a feed for the second chick.

I turned to look up at the nest once more. I noticed some movement at the corner of my eye. Turning, I was surprised to see another bird, a plump green one. It was too high for me to see anything clearly but I thought it was sitting on a pad of twigs.

“Who is that?” I asked.

“Oh! That’s a Green Pigeon. She is also nesting.”





Mother Oriole continued, "let me show you something. Can you see the tree next to ours? That is a Fig tree. Look carefully at it. Can you see a small whitish cup nest at the far end? A real small one? That belongs to the White Eye. A bit higher, on the next branch, do you see another cup nest? It is slightly bigger and made of fine sticks. That is the Bulbul's nest. Look at the lowermost branch. Can you see a pendent nest? That belongs to the Purple Sunbird. To the right, do you see a horizontal branch? In the fork, do you see a bigger cup nest? Why, you can see the chicks in it too. That is the Drongo's nest and those are the Drongo's chicks. Move further to the next tree. That is also a Siris tree. Can you see a small brown bird with a very long tail? That is the Paradise Flycatcher and the small cup nest ..."

“Stop! Stop!” What’s going on? So many birds and so many nest? I don’t even know where to look. I am getting dizzy! Before you show me any more ...”

Mother Oriole cut me short, “all I am trying to tell you is that we birds like to build our nests near the Drongo’s nest”.

“But why?”

“Simple. Drongoes are very watchful birds. They fiercely protect their territory. They do not hesitate to attack and chase away birds that can harm their nest or chicks. They allow only some birds to nest near them. For instance, you will not find a Crow’s nest on the same tree as the Drongo’s”.





The mention of the Crow reminded me of the chase. "What has the Crow to do with all this? Why! You were chasing one too!"

"Well, if you must know!" sighed Mother Oriole and continued, "some birds are fond of fruits and berries, some like nectar, some seeds. Most birds, including us eat insects. And some birds just love eggs, chicks, small birds and animals. Each has its own food habits ..."

"Wait! I get it! The Crow was after your chick!" A sudden realization dawned upon me and everything fell in place. Drongoes provide these birds some security. But they can't count on them always. They have to do their bit, like the fine chase I saw earlier.

Introducing the characters and their nests



First born



Oriole's nest with second chick



Mother Oriole on nest



Father Oriole



Green pigeon's nest



Green pigeon



White Eye's nest



Bulbul's nest and chick



Bulbuls



Purple Sunbird's nest



Drongo's nest and chicks



Drongoes



Paradise Flycatcher's nest



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